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L E T T E R

TO THE

C L E R G Y

OF THE

DIOCESE OF CHESTER,

BY

B E I L B Y

L O R D B I S H O P

OF THAT

D I O C E S E.

1781.

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C H E S T E R.

PRINTED BY J. POOLE, IN FOREGATE-STREET.

LETTER

OF THE

OF THE



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OF THE

REVEREND BRETHREN,

ON account of the peculiar circumstances of my Diocese respecting the Roman Catholics, it has been for a long time past my intention to offer to your consideration some precautions concerning them. But as an order was given last year by the House of Lords to make an exact enquiry into the number of Papists in England and Wales, I thought it advisable to wait the result of that enumeration.

The Returns of this Survey (which I have reason to believe was made with great accuracy) were several months ago laid on the table of the House of Peers, open to the inspection of every Lord in the House. From these it appears that the trifling increase of the Roman Catholics, since the



last Survey in 1767, is exceedingly below what some well meaning but ill-informed people conceived it to be, \* and even much less than might have been expected from the great increase of population throughout the kingdom in general; but especially in the Diocese of Chester. † It appears, also, that the present number of Papists, compared with that of all the inhabitants in this country, is much too inconsiderable to cause the smallest alarm in any reasonable mind. ‡ And when to this we add, what

is

\* The number of Papists in England and Wales returned to the House of Lords in 1767 was 67,916. In 1780—69,376. The difference is only 1460. It was affirmed in pamphlets and news-papers that converts to Popery were made by thousands and ten thousands every year.

† This growth of population since the Revolution, and especially within the last fifty years, has been very clearly proved by Mr. Howlett in his *Examination of Dr. Price's Essay, &c.* lately published. He has shewn in p. 126, that in the Diocese of Chester only, there has been since the year 1717 an increase of 251,125 souls.

‡ Supposing, what Mr. Howlett has rendered highly probable, that the number of souls in England and



is a well known fact, that several Roman Catholic gentlemen of the very first distinction, and of the largest fortunes, have of late years conformed to the Established Church, and must undoubtedly have drawn after them many of their relations, friends and dependents, we may very reasonably conclude, that the Church of Rome is, upon the whole, rather losing than gaining ground amongst us.

But altho' for these and many other reasons, which might be assigned, it is evident that the Protestant Religion in this kingdom can have nothing formidable to apprehend from so feeble a sect; yet as it always has been and still is much more numerous, and of course an object of more importance in the Diocese of Chester than in any other §; and as their zeal to make profelytes, and the ar-

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tifices

Wales is at the lowest computation eight millions, the Papists, who are under 70,000, do not make an hundredth part of the whole.

§ According to the Survey taken the last year,

tifices they sometimes use for that purpose ought always to be watched with a jealous eye, and guarded against with the greatest caution; I therefore think it my duty to address a few pages to you on this subject, and to lay before you the result of the information I have received (in consequence of the late enquiry) from various parts of my Diocese.

It were greatly to be wished that we who profess so pure a faith should be as solicitous to gain converts to it, as the Romanists are to propagate their superstitious doctrines. One reason why we are not, perhaps is, because although we consider their religion as a very corrupt one, yet we allow it possible for them to be saved in it; whereas *they* confine Salvation entirely within the pale of their own Church. This will certainly make the spirit of Proselytism stronger in them than in us. Yet still a little more earnestness in the cause of truth than we commonly shew would highly become

the number of Papists in the Diocese of Chester is  
27,228.

become us ; nor ought we to omit any favourable opportunity of converting a Papist “ from the error of his ways,” whenever we can do it by fair arguments and honourable means. But undoubtedly we shall be in a high degree culpable, if we do not at least stand resolutely upon the defensive and exert our utmost endeavours to protect those who are under our care from the seductions of Popery. I do not indeed find, after the strictest examination into the fact, that the number of converts made of late years to the Church of Rome is at all considerable, not even in those parts of the Diocese of Chester, where the Roman Catholics are most numerous and powerful. The few that have been perverted are almost all of the lowest rank and the lowest understanding, and scarce any of them are profelytes on principle, or on the ground of fair and open reasoning. The means generally made use of to seduce them are (as I am informed from various quarters) these that follow :

1<sup>st</sup>, That most powerful of all arguments *a bribe* is frequently offered to the



ignorant rustic. Sometimes a small sum of money is the bait; sometimes the crumbs which fall from a rich man's table; sometimes the promise of an establishment in a little farm, or a profitable trade. Every lure, in short, is tried in its turn, till an effectual one is found out: and the frailty of human nature is too well known to suppose it will not sometimes give way to temptations of this kind, so artfully accommodated to the disposition of the subject to be practised on. To minds uncultivated by education and unsupported by principle they too often prove irresistible, and it can be no great wonder if a poor labourer is now and then prevailed on to renounce his religion, as Esau did his birthright, for a mess of pottage.

2. Another method by which converts are not uncommonly made to the Romish Communion is, the intermarriage of Papists with Protestants. In the higher classes of life these marriages (though in most cases hazardous) are not always attended with bad consequences; such stipulations being usually made before hand as secure each

each party and their children in the undisturbed enjoyment of their respective religions. But in the lower ranks of people such precautions being seldom used, they too often "make shipwreck of their faith." It must be owned indeed that the Church of England is sometimes a gainer by these intermarriages as well as the Church of Rome. But the balance is, I fear, upon the whole, in favour of the latter. For which ever of the two parties happens to be the Papist, that party being generally more earnest and expert in the business of Proselytism, than the other, is too frequently successful; and the persuasive arts of the wife, or the menaces and sometimes violences of the husband, when exerted with zeal and perseverance, seldom fail to carry their point at last.

3. A third contrivance, and I fear the most mischievous one of all, is that of Roman Catholic gentlemen taking servants or labourers, and tradesmen taking apprentices, of the Protestant Religion, in order to *reconcile them* (as it is called) to the Church of Rome. I know indeed

that there are many gentlemen of that Communion who disdain such practices as these; who have the liberality to insist on all their Protestant servants constantly attending the parish church; who restrain their Priests from the least attempt to pervert the principles of their domestics, and distribute their favours and their charity indiscriminately and impartially both to Papists and Protestants. This generosity of conduct certainly deserves great praise. But there are others (as I have reason to believe) of that persuasion who act differently, and who either encourage or connive at the conversion of their Protestant servants. The danger is, I believe, still greater in the case of Popish tradesmen, and their Protestant apprentices. Some of these masters, I am assured, take very improper methods to work upon the minds of the young people who are under their roof, and although these may sometimes have the fortitude and sense to resist, yet when a poor lad is given up into the hands of a rigid bigot, for the long term of seven years, it is easy to see that the contest between them must be a very unequal one.

These



These then being the principal expedients to which the Roman Catholics have recourse to disseminate their superstitions, it must be unnecessary to remind you, that to counteract these stratagems should be one great object of your care and attention. And the most effectual way of doing this I conceive, will be to make use of *preventive* remedies; to guard your people by early and frequent cautions against these seductions, and to exhort them in the strongest terms, both in public and in private, not to form such connections as are apt to prove so dangerous to their religious principles. To those whose poverty is likely to prove a snare to them, you will represent in the strongest terms, the extreme folly as well as wickedness of bartering their religion for gold; and will point out to them that most forcible expostulation of holy writ so applicable to their case: "what is a man profited if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" You will endeavour to convince them that if they will but bear up under their present difficulties with Christian fortitude, and "possess their souls in

patience," if they will but preserve their faith and integrity unshaken, and after doing their utmost to maintain themselves in an honest way, "cast all their care upon God," and trust in his gracious Providence for their support, he will not fail to extricate them in his good time out of their distress. Let them only "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and persevere in that pure mode of worship in which they have been brought up, and they may depend upon it, that all other things, which are really necessary for them, will by the blessing of Heaven on their virtuous industry "be added to them:" and that they may always find out the means of supporting themselves and their families comfortably in this world, without forfeiting by a venal conversion their everlasting salvation in the next.

With respect to young persons, their security must altogether depend on the care taken of them by their parents, relations, guardians or friends. These, therefore, you will not fail to dissuade in the most earnest manner from the practice of suffer-  
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ing their children or wards to enter either as Servants or Apprentices into Roman Catholic families, where although they *may*, and sometimes *do*, through the moderation and good sense of the master, continue unsolicited and untainted; yet the danger of their being seduced is certainly very great. To expose them to so much temptation is an act of great cruelty and injustice; and it is the more unpardonable, because it cannot be defended on the plea either of necessity or of interest. There is much greater choice both of services and of trades in Protestant than in Popish families, and their advantage in every point of view will commonly be much better consulted by placing them in the former than in the latter. Why therefore their eternal interests are to be wantonly risked where the gain can be nothing, and the loss may be infinite, is a question which ought to be well considered, and pressed home on the consciences of those who are concerned to answer it. †

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† Particular care should be taken with respect to those poor children that are apprenticed out by parish officers; who will sometimes ignorantly, and some-



In the case of marriages it may be a matter of more delicacy for the Minister to interfere, especially where there is on both sides a strong and sincere affection. Yet even here it will be acting a fair and a friendly part to apprise the Protestant party in time of the danger and inconvenience of such alliances; that whatever choice is made may be made at least with a clear apprehension of the probable consequences, and as much care may be taken as is possible to guard against them by preliminary articles. But as these contracts are most common among the lower orders of the people, and generally take their rise from worldly and interested motives, it is a matter of duty as well as an act of common humanity to make them sensible how little comfort can be expected from an union founded on such sordid views, and how miserably they consult their present peace, as well as their future felicity by connections at once so mercenary and so unnatural.

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times designedly bind them to Papists in order to save a few pounds. I have even heard of such a thing as a *Papist Overseer*, which is surely a most shameful and illegal appointment.

There is still one point more that deserves consideration, and that is, the Schools kept by Roman Catholics, where Protestant as well as Popish children are sometimes taught. These schools, I must confess, have always appeared to me to be attended with some degree of danger. Their own children, let them, if they please, educate in their own way and by their own instructors. To restrain them from this would be a measure as contrary to all sound policy, as it certainly is to every principle of justice and humanity. It could have no other effect than that of forcing their youth to Romish seminaries abroad, where they would probably imbibe much grosser superstitions, and political sentiments much more hostile to the English constitution, than they could possibly learn in this country. It would therefore be very unwise, as well as very cruel, to suppress all places of education for Roman Catholics. But it does not seem to me necessary on any grounds either of wisdom or humanity, to intrust them with the education of Protestant children. It gives them too many opportunities of infusing their prejudices insensibly into the tender minds of youth, and making

making such early and deep impressions upon them, as it may be difficult if not impossible afterwards to efface. It is however doing them but common justice, to acknowledge that no complaints of this nature have come to me from my own Diocese; and although a few conversions have been effected there by the means above-mentioned; yet I have not hitherto been made acquainted with a single one that has been brought about in any Popish School.

This shews that there is either more indifference, or more liberality of sentiment, in some of these people than one should naturally expect; yet still as I do not chuse to trust a matter of so much importance as the first religious notions of a child to the direction of persons who have generally been more celebrated for their zeal than their prudence, I must intreat you to make use of every argument you can think of to convince your parishioners of the extreme impropriety and danger of sending their children to Popish Schools. The remedy for this evil is plainly in our own hands. If no Protestants will allow their children



children to attend such schools, no Protestants can ever be taught there. The practice indeed I hope is not very common, and there certainly cannot be the least shadow of an excuse for it in any part of England; but least of all in this Diocese, which abounds more in excellent Protestant Schools, adapted to all classes of people from the highest to the lowest, than any other district of the kingdom that I am acquainted with. There can be no other possible inducement for placing them in Roman Catholic Schools than that of having them taught at a cheaper rate, or perhaps without any expence at all; which is an object so mean, when set in competition with the mischief it may draw after it, that I should hope you would find it no difficult matter to make the very lowest of the people ashamed of it.

But besides the preventive measures which have been here touched upon, there is still another no less necessary. For it must after all be confessed that the surest way in every instance to guard against error, is to lay early and deep the foundations of truth. You cannot therefore more effectually secure  
your

your parishioners against the delusions of Popery, than by carefully instilling into their minds when young, the grounds and rudiments of the Protestant Faith. The obvious method of doing this is by explaining to them (as I am persuaded you fail not to do) carefully and familiarly every part of the Church Catechism; which besides furnishing them with the first principles of Christianity, will afford you frequent opportunities of pointing out and exposing the principal corruptions of the Church of Rome. This you will see done with admirable judgement and skill in a book which I am happy to find you are all perfectly well acquainted with, *Archbishop Secker's Lectures on the Church Catechism*. When once you have brought your parishioners well acquainted with this excellent summary of Christian Faith and Practice, and also with those parts of Holy Scripture which are most plain and level to their capacities, there will, I hope, be little danger of their becoming profelytes to the Romish Communion.

But as a still further security, I would  
beg

beg leave to recommend to you for their use another work of the same excellent Prelate, viz. his *Five Sermons against Popery*, which are to be found in the sixth volume of his *Miscellaneous Sermons*. As those Five Sermons contain the best and most masterly confutation of the Romish Faith that is to be found in our language in so small a compass; and as it would not be easy for every one to get access to them in the voluminous collection in which they were originally published; for these reasons I have lately detached them from his works, and thrown them into the form of a little Tract, entitled *A Brief Confutation of the Errors of the Church of Rome*. Some hundreds of these I have ordered to be sent into those parts of my Diocese where the Roman Catholics are most numerous, and if more should be wanted, they may be had by applying to the Publishers, *Messrs. John Rivington and Sons, in St. Paul's Church-yard, London*. Many other still smaller Tracts of this sort are sold at a very easy rate by the *Society for promoting Christian Knowledge*, which it may be convenient sometimes to distribute amongst your parishioners,



rishioners, especially of the younger sort. Several of these are very well calculated to preserve the ignorant and unwary from the artifices of Popery; and as one of these artifices is said to be the circulation of small books adapted to the capacities of the vulgar, it may be prudent, in this instance, to imitate their example, and vanquish them with their own weapons. †

Should you find any larger treatise on this subject necessary, there is a very excellent one published a few years since in one octavo volume, by the Rev. Mr. Smith. He was formerly a Priest in the Church

† To those clergymen who are not already members of the Society above-mentioned for promoting *Christian Knowledge*, and whose circumstances will allow it, I would earnestly recommend their becoming so without delay. The expence is trifling; the use may be great. The distribution of the little religious tracts belonging to the Society will in some measure supply the want of what I fear is too much disused amongst us—*personal conference* with our parishioners. Proper information concerning the mode and terms of admission may be had by writing to Mr Hallings, Secretary to the Society, in Bartlett's Buildings, Holborn, London.

Church of Rome; became a convert to the Church of England from principle; was admitted into it by Archbishop Secker, and has now, by the kindness of the present Archbishop of Canterbury, preferment in Kent. This book contains much curious information and learning on the Popish controversy; and as he had opportunities of knowing what those points are on which the Romanists rest the chief strength of their cause, he has set himself to combat these with peculiar earnestness and singular success.\*

All these precautions are, as you will perceive, perfectly consistent with that gentleness of manners and humanity of deportment, which the Scriptures so strongly enjoin even towards our enemies, and which have always so eminently distinguished your treatment of your Roman Catholic neighbours. God forbid that the glorious cause of Protestantism should ever stand in need

\* The title of Mr. Smith's book is, *The Errors of the Church of Rome detected, in ten Dialogues, &c.* It is sold by Johnson in St. Paul's Church-yard, London.

of cruelty, oppression, or persecution to support it! It has, I trust, much better and more evangelical weapons to defend itself with than these. These are the arms of falsehood and bigotry. The arms of a Protestant are of a very different temper, and very different materials; *reason, argument, persuasion*, and above all, *the word of God*. His religion is the religion of the gospel, and the gospel, we all know, allows of no other force in religion but the force of truth; no other sword but that of the spirit. The true secret, in short, for checking the growth of Popery, or of any other corrupt religion is, **LENITY AND VIGILANCE IN CONJUNCTION**. This is the conduct which Divine Wisdom itself has recommended; and human wisdom will not find out a better. "Be ye wise as serpents," says the divine oracle, "and harmless as doves." This precept then my brethren, you will, I am confident, most punctually fulfil. You will be *wise as serpents* in guarding against the seductions of the Romanists, and *harmless as doves* towards their properties and their persons. By Arts such as these you will

not



not only prevent their errors from making any progress amongst us, but will also probably gain many converts from them to your own Communion. For there cannot be a more effectual way to win the hearts, and subdue the prejudices, even of the most bigotted and superstitious, than to convince them by the mildness and benevolence of your conduct, that the religion which prompts it is the only true evangelical religion ; that it is the religion of him who “ was meek and lowly in heart,” who would suffer no sword to be drawn, no fire to be brought down from heaven, on his enemies ; who declared on the contrary that he came “ not to destroy mens lives but to save them,” and whose great object it evidently was in every instance to bring peace on earth, and diffuse good-will amongst men.

I am, reverend brethren,

Your affectionate friend,

And faithful servant,

**B. CHESTER.**

*Chester, Sept. 15, 1781.*

## P O S T S C R I P T.

I take this opportunity of making a few additions to my former *printed Directions, respecting Candidates for Orders, &c.*

It is necessary to inform those who may offer themselves for Orders, that a *Chapelry* or *perpetual Curacy* is not a proper title for *Deacon's Orders*. The reason is, because no one can be licensed to a Chapelry till he is in *Priest's Orders*. And as a License is the only mode of obtaining legal possession of such benefices, it is evident that no *Deacon* can be regularly appointed to them. But he may be appointed *assistent Curate* to the person who is already licensed to a Chapelry, or to any other beneficed Clergyman, and that will be his *proper* title.

And whenever any Clergyman appoints an assistant Curate, I must desire to be previously acquainted with his reasons for so doing.

To prevent those very frequent changes which are continually taking place in the small Chapelries of the Northern parts of the  
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the Diocese, to the great inconvenience of the inhabitants, I shall hereafter require every person to continue at least two years on the Chapelry to which he is first appointed.

I must also here repeat what I have before declared, that I shall adhere to the Canon in ordaining none under *twenty-three years of age*, except in very extraordinary cases; and that I expect every Candidate to be well qualified in all the books specified in my printed directions.

It is my desire that the *Si quis* may be published in the Parish Church or Chapel where the Candidate resides, *three Sundays* before he offers himself for Ordination. And he may bring it with him when he comes. Whoever comes without it will not be ordained.

The form of the *Si quis* and of the *Certificate of its publication* must be as follows, viz.

“Whereas R. T. of this parish, intends

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to



to offer himself a Candidate for the holy  
Order of [Deacons or Priests] at the en-  
suing Ordination, to be held by the Right  
Reverend the Lord Bishop of Chester at  
on the day  
of next.

"This is to give notice, that if any  
person can shew sufficient cause, just im-  
pediment, or notable crime, for which the  
said R. T. ought not to be admitted to  
that holy Order, he may now declare the  
same, or give notice thereof by Letter to the  
Bishop of Chester.

"The above notice was publicly read  
in the Parish Church of in  
the county of during the  
time of Divine Service, on Sunday the  
Sunday the and Sunday  
the day of 1781, and  
no objections were made.

Witnesses { A. B. Rector, Vicar, or Curate.  
B. C. D. E. Churchwardens."

In respect to Testimonials (which I ear-  
nestly beg every Clergyman will consider,

not as mere matters of form, but as very serious attestations,) The person who gives the title ought not to be one of the three who sign the Testimonial.

The proper form of a Certificate of Baptism is *the very words of the entry in the Register*, copied exactly from thence; and attested by the Minister and Churchwardens.

There is one more point which stands in need of some explanation.

It seems to be a prevailing opinion in some parts of this Diocese, that when Chapelries or perpetual Curacies are to be resigned, nothing more is necessary than for the incumbent to declare that he has relinquished the Cure, and to return his License to the Bishop or the Chancellor. But this is a great mistake, and creates much trouble and confusion. *No augmented Chapelry or perpetual Curacy* can be legally resigned but by the same means that any other benefice is resigned; that is, by a written instrument drawn up in due form, executed before a Notary Public, then tendered to the  
Bishop

Bishop either in person or by proxy, and accepted by him. And no new nomination ought to be made out, till the Bishop has actually signified that he *does* accept such resignation. For till he has done this, the benefice is not vacant, and of course the nomination is of no effect.

The proper form of a resignation, and the whole method of proceeding in such cases may be always had by writing to my Secretaries, *Mr. Clapham, in Dartmouth-street, Westminster*; or *Mr. William Nickolls, at the Registry, in Chester.*

**F I N I S.**

